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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [IT](#) [FORCES](#) [IN](#) [ITALY](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY: FACTORS AFFECTING BASING OF U.S. MILITARY FORCES

Classified By: DCM Emil Skodon, 1.5 B and D.

Summary

1. (S/NF) US military forces in Italy, which are present under NATO auspices and operate on Italian (not US) bases, are generally welcome, and we expect that situation to continue. In return for basing access, Italy expects a spirit of partnership, timely consultation, and full respect for Italian sovereignty. In general, US operations under NATO or UN auspices gain swift political approval; requests for unilateral US operations from Italian bases are more complex, and could be denied depending upon the Italian political context. Changes in US basing posture in Italy are generally acceptable, if founded on sound military and/or economic principles, balanced, and consistent with the NATO umbrella under which our forces operate in Italy. Issues related to specific locations of US forces can be more difficult and subject to extensive discussion, although we generally get to yes. The Berlusconi government offers a unique opportunity to finalize basing agreements (TAs) under the 1995 Shell Agreement; it is in USG interest to nail these down without further delay. End summary.

US Forces are welcome in Italy...

2. (S/NF) The US has a long and positive history of basing military forces in Italy, and this situation is accepted as normal by most Italians. Approximately 15,000 US soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are stationed in Italy at eight major installations. There are, however, no US bases per se in Italy; all US forces are present under NATO auspices on Italian repeat Italian bases. US military forces are generally good guests, maintaining high professional standards and heeding to environmental, safety, and other standards that often surpass those required locally. While much attention today is focused on our excellent bilateral relations with PM Berlusconi's center-right government, its center-left predecessors were also generally receptive to the presence of US forces in Italy. This long history has paid dividends: Italian communities often feel a vested interest in their local bases, and the US and Italian militaries generally work together closely at these facilities.

... in return for consultation, partnership, and respect for sovereignty

3. (S/NF) In the period after the Cold War, Italy has sought a more mature relationship with the US, stressing partnership and early consultation on issues of mutual concern. This is especially true on matters related to the presence and activities of US military forces in Italy. The 1998 Cavalese tragedy, in which 20 persons died when a US military aircraft severed a ski gondola cable, brought these concerns to the fore, and they have never been far from the surface in subsequent years. One of the reasons for this vigilance is the fact that Italian military and civilian officials can be (and have been) held both civilly and criminally liable for lapses or misjudgments that involve US forces and occur during the course of those officials' duties. The bottom line is that Italian authorities now inquire with far greater frequency and specificity about US military activities in Italy, expect to be briefed fully and, failing that, are not beyond denying the US permission to operate.

NATO Operations v. Unilateral Operations

4. (S/NF) Since US forces in Italy are present under NATO auspices, Italian governments are quick to provide full support for Alliance operations, even when public and

political support for a specific operation (e.g., Kosovo) might be weak. The same is generally true for missions carried out pursuant to UN authorization, and would likely be the same for a Berlin Plus operation involving NATO support for an EU lead. When a proposed operation involving Italian territory lacks a multilateral imprimatur, Italy's response will generally be based on an ad hoc set of factors, according to political exigencies and the government of the day. The deployment of the 173rd Airborne Brigade to northern Iraq during OIF was politically complicated for this reason. Although Berlusconi's government was as good as its word and facilitated the deployment, the decision was politically difficult, and a center-left government might well have come out the other way.

15. (S/NF) US planners should carefully consider the likely missions of US military personnel -- and likely stances of Italian officials -- before making final decisions to seek basing for them in Italy. For example, proposed basing of U-2 aircraft in Sicily for operations in the Middle East led to extensive (albeit ultimately successful) negotiations, even though the U-2 operations were flown in support of the Camp David accords. Special operations forces in Italy could pose particularly difficult issues because of their need to meet unilateral requirements rapidly. When the possibility of basing SOF was raised with Italy over a decade ago, its reaction was cool. If SOF were based in Italy, their ability to operate freely would not, in our view, be guaranteed.

Basing changes are acceptable, in general...

16. (S/NF) Italian political and military leaders have a sophisticated understanding of the US, and generally endorse steps to make our military forces more efficient and better positioned. They accepted limited NATO restructuring, even when it "cost" Italy (i.e., AirSouth). Likewise, they will grumble little at the macro level about repositioning of US forces presently in Italy, so long as such changes make military and economic sense and there is no perception of Italy -- whose government supported OEF and OIF in the face of strong opposition from the center-left and public opinion -- being singled out for adverse treatment.

.. but scrutinized for local impact

17. (S/NF) Since all politics) including Italian politics) is local, the views of both local communities and national authorities are important in considering specific basing changes. Generally speaking, Italy favors basing US forces south and east, for both political and economic reasons. Most importantly, Italy's political and military leaders expect us to consult with) and listen to) them on proposed basing changes.

18. (S/NF) In 2000, the Italian government was initially cool to our proposal to augment SETAF (Vicenza) with additional troops, pointing out that the Veneto area has high population density, low unemployment, and a highly stressed

infrastructure, and that a &better8 alternative (Camp Darby) existed. In the end, we gained approval only when we promised not to exceed previously-agreed personnel numbers and to seek no expansion of existing facilities (i.e., build up and not out). Improvements to the sub tending operation at Santo Stefano/La Maddalena offer an equally challenging set of issues, since it is located in a marine nature preserve and uses over two dozen sites. Closure of Gaeta, currently home port for the Sixth Fleet flagship, while locally significant, might cause relatively few ripples on the national level.

19. (S/NF) Italy's insistence on timely consultation is not new. US requests in the late 80's to relocate the 401st Tactical Fighter Wing from Torrejon AFB to a specific site in Italy met with resistance; Italy insisted that we first conduct site surveys on three other locations. Examples abound, but the rule is simple: consult early and often with local and national authorities about proposed changes in basing footprints and, when possible, take on board their concerns.

Berlusconi's government: a unique opportunity to lock in basing agreements

110. (S/NF) The 1995 Shell Agreement provides for the establishment of technical agreements (TAs) for each base with US forces. After almost two years of negotiations, no TAs under the Shell have been finalized, even though the bilateral Joint Military Commission continues to work

intensively on the issue. Most issues are resolved, but one sticking point involves differing views by US military services on legal and financial issues. Embassy Rome is agnostic on how these differences are resolved, but urges in strongest terms that they be resolved as soon as possible. As noted earlier, the Berlusconi government provides an unprecedented opportunity to work with the Italians. We do not foresee any successor government offering more favorable terms for TAs. Given that elections will be held in Spring 2006, or possibly earlier, we need to accelerate progress on all TAs, including the Sigonella TA, if we want to secure the best possible terms for the US military. We recommend that the USG lock in these provisions without further delay. Failure to do so could erode our operational capabilities in Italy.

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